

## **Sticks and Stones by hexlibris**

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**Summary:**

*Harrington and Hargrove, sitting in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G—*

## Sticks and Stones

### Author's Note:

this is just something dumb i wrote to decompress after an awful week at uni. it is 110% inspired by [this hand-holding gif](#)

“I hate you,” Harrington says.

At least, that’s what Billy thinks he’s trying to say. His voice is a little muffled under the ice pack he’s got pressed over his nose, but judging from the way Harrington’s glaring daggers at him, it’s probably safe to assume he’s not making a love confession.

“Sticks and stones, sweetheart,” he replies. Lowering his head, gurgling deep in his throat to spit a wad of blood into the bucket the school nurse has placed at his feet. His face feels like it’s swaddled in a cage of nettles, pain stinging and pricking at his nose and mouth. Harrington’s faring no better; his nose, already with a natural slant to it, seems to be leaning more and more to the left with every passing second. “You’re gonna have to put a splint on that.”

“Fuck off,” Harrington fumes. “You’re a goddamn idiot, you know that, Hargrove? This is all your fault. I have a *date* tonight, and—”

“I wasn’t the one who made that dumbass play—”

“If you’d just moved out of the way when I—”

Someone bangs their fist against the opaque glass of the door; Billy hears boys jeering, laughter from the corridor outside. Harrington huffs and slides his legs off the bed, standing up to yank the door open and push his head through the gap. “Fuckers,” he says after a moment, slamming the door shut.

“What are they saying about us now?”

It isn’t the first time he and Harrington have been the lone participants in a skirmish. November’s marked them, dogging their footsteps so that every subsequent run-in feels almost tainted with

unrealized tension. It's not Billy who's changed; he never even apologized. It's Harrington—Harrington, who now carries himself with a quiet, electric intensity that, frankly, is not only out of character, but more than a little disturbing. Harrington, dogging his steps, watchful. Billy has enough of being watched when he's at home; he doesn't like feeling like he's under constant surveillance when he's at school, too.

"They're asking us if we're—procreating," replies Harrington. It looks like it causes him great pain to even say aloud, but that could just be the swelling.

Billy arches a brow. "*Procreating?* What kind of three dollar word—"

"You want a three dollar word?" Harrington crawls back on the bed with a groan. "*Shut up.*"

Billy can't help himself. "That's two words—"

"Hargrove, I swear to God, if you don't shut the fuck up, I'll do worse than break your nose."

Billy tips his head forwards and spits more blood into the bucket, wiping crimson drool from his chin. "So you admit it? You ran into me?"

"Not on *purpose*, I didn't—"

"Not exactly what I had in mind when I told you to plant your feet," Billy says.

He can still hear it, the sickening crack that sounded through the entire gym as Harrington, looking the other way, torpedoed into him. Billy's endured worse hits to the head, but there's something especially awful about the sound his nose had made when the cartilage snapped; it wasn't unlike the crunch he hears when he takes that first bite of morning cereal. He's sure it would've been hilarious to watch—like something out of a comic book, zig-zagging speech bubbles over their heads illustrating each sorry action: *WHOOSH!* went Harrington as he ran after the ball, all knobby, lanky limbs, not even watching where he was going; *KA-POW!* went Billy's head as

they collided and he thumped backwards onto the waxed floor, Harrington's sweat-flushed, wide-eyed face inches away from his own. For the first time in their sordid history together, Harrington had knocked him flat on his ass; not only that, but Harrington had frozen guiltily on top of him like a deer in headlights and fucking *blushed* when Tommy started the inevitable chant from the sidelines: “*You see that? They kissed! Harrington and Hargrove, sitting in a tree! K-I-S-S-I-N-G—*”

“It was an accident,” Harrington sniffs.

“Just making sure we’re on the same page.” Billy shoves a finger in his face; Harrington shies away from it like a skittish horse. “You ran at me like a fucking lunatic. I was just *there*.”

“Yeah, you’re always just *there*.”

Billy stares at him, aghast. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

Harrington’s chin takes on a stubborn jut; he looks like an overgrown baby with the ice pack pressed over his puffy nose, eyes all red and watery like they’re about to cry. “Nothing.”

*Doesn’t sound like nothing to me*, Billy thinks. It never is, with Harrington. They don’t talk about that; whenever it seems like they’re on the verge of doing so, the moment dances teasingly out of their reach, a sneeze that builds in the chest and dies before it hits.

“I didn’t kiss you,” Harrington bursts out finally. “Tommy’s just saying—”

“I know what he’s saying,” says Billy. In a remarkable show of self-control, he doesn’t tack anything onto the end of that sentence, he just lets it hang there. Harrington looks visibly uncomfortable with his sudden silence; his foot knocks forcefully against the steel railing of the bed like a personal vendetta.

Billy’s nose burns. He gargles and spits, watching the blood gather in a dully glistening puddle at the bottom of the bucket.

He’s starting to think he should be quiet more often, around Harrington. He’s quite enjoying the way it seems to be making him

squirm, like Steve believes there's something even more suspect about his silence than when Billy's being loud and getting up in his face. That's power, Billy thinks; not power itself, but the perception of it by other people. Power in him sitting here, letting Steve stew under the weight of all those unsaid words until, predictably, the mousey squeak of his Nikes knocking against the bed halts and he blurts, "That's not how I like to kiss, anyway."

He startles when Billy erupts into harsh, sneering laughter. "No shit," he says meanly. "You mean you *don't* break people's noses when you kiss them in Indiana? Shit man, it must be a Cali thing. Shoulda known you Midwesterners are all pussies."

When he spits again, a fleck of blood lands on the toe of Harrington's sneaker, shockingly red on white.

"God," Harrington curses, drawing his legs up onto the bed, "you're such a Neanderthal. That how you treated Vicki, huh?"

"Vicki look like she got a broken nose to you?"

"No, but you still gave her the runaround."

Billy just grins at him. It's a grin he reserves only for Harrington, because he knows how much the guy hates it; a smarmy, calculating grin, perfectly infuriating. "Don't you know you should never believe rumors?"

Rumors he spread himself, entirely on purpose, after Vicki had smoked all his weed and unzipped his jeans to find he wasn't even hard. You'd think a guy would be bouncing like a bag of beans the first time he gets laid, even if the girl's only a five on the Richter scale and honestly, Vicki Yates barely meets that criteria on a good day—but Billy had stayed soft even when she rubbed her tits on his face, and after pushing her off he'd gone back to his dad's place to take out the copy of *Bear Magazine* he'd hidden in a loose floorboard under his bed and found his release, a wretched, fleeting thing, within the circle of his fist. The next morning, he'd told Tommy that he'd gone all the way with Vicki, that she'd moaned like a whore, that she'd even let him stick the tip of his dick in her ass—and Tommy, naturally, had done the rest. The look on Harrington's face

when he'd overheard was almost worth the stinging slap Vicki had given him in the parking lot afterwards.

"Rumors are based in fact, asshole," Harrington says. "And you *are* an asshole."

"Like you're any better," Billy retorts, scornful. "You act so high and fucking mighty, like you're cut from a different cloth than the rest of us—what, because you dated Wheeler that one time? You wanna know the rumors I heard about *King Steve*, before that pencil-necked bitch got her claws in him? 'Cause they ain't pretty."

"That's all water under the bridge," says Harrington loftily, "and I still knew how to kiss a girl back then."

"I know how to kiss a girl," snaps Billy.

It's Harrington's turn to grin; there's a low, knowing glint in his eye that Billy doesn't like the look of at all. "You sure about that?"

"Pretty fucking sure, unless you want a demonstration, Harrington? How 'bout I put it in a graph for you, huh?"

Harrington leans forwards, his knee pressing gently against Billy's leg and Jesus Christ, Billy can feel his leg hairs standing up where Harrington's practically rubbing up against them. Jesus fucking Christ, he'd only been half-joking, but Steve's looking at him with those wide, watery little-boy eyes and Billy feels his stomach drop like he's in one of those dreams where you look down and suddenly realize you're not wearing any pants and you're in public and people are staring, *stop fucking staring at me*, he wants to scream at Steve—

"I'm just curious, you know," Harrington says. Still watching him, his expression open, earnest. "For science."

"For—for science," Billy repeats, and his voice echoes in the cramped space of the nurse's office, heady, smothering. Harrington's knee presses against his with slightly more force; he's so close, all Billy has to do is reach out and his fingers would be stroking Harrington's thigh. He has nice thighs, Billy's noted on more than one occasion; nice kneecaps, too. You can't really say that about a lot of kneecaps,

because they're weird on principle. Billy's starting to realize that all of Steve, from his goofy slanted nose to his kneecaps to his oddly jointed hands, is nice, and it makes him fucking sick to his stomach.

It makes him hard, too. Harder than he was, and ever will be with Vicki; harder than he's ever been in his entire life.

"Come on, let's see what you got, Hargrove," Steve says, and it's the dare lacing his tone that snares Billy like a worm on a fish hook; he's never been one to turn down a challenge.

He lunges into Steve's space, planting his hand on his thigh and crowding him back across the bed until Steve's trapped against the wall, whimpering under the savage, biting assault of his mouth. Steve Harrington is fucking *whimpering* against him, breathless exhalations of air that will probably be a permanent fixture in Billy's bedtime jerk-off fantasies for the next decade or so; his hands flatten themselves against Billy's chest, as if torn between shoving him off and hauling him back for more. "Billy," he gasps between kisses, and that won't do, because Billy has to have all of him; he's going to have every little whimper and sigh that falls from Harrington's lips, squeeze out every last drop until Steve's hollow and aching around him, and never mind the burning in his nose or the freshly oozing blood that's now everywhere, staining their mouths and Harrington's gym shirt—"Billy, stop."

Billy pulls back in a haze of pain and bloodlust, panting like a dog in the height of summer. "What?"

"You kiss like—" Harrington pauses to wet his lips; Billy wants to make him do it again, slower, so he can tilt his chin upwards and track the motion of Harrington's tongue with his eyes. "Okay, please don't take offense to this, but—"

"You got a problem with the way I kiss?" Billy says, too loudly.

"Well," Harrington stammers, clearly stalling for time, "you're kind of ... you're kind of *aggressive*."

"So? Girls like aggressive."

Harrington presses his fingers to the bridge of his nose, winces, then lowers his hand. “How many girls have you actually kissed? And no, your mom doesn’t count,” he says, and Billy knows he didn’t mean anything malicious by it, but holy shit, he wants to fucking hit him for that.

“Do numbers really matter? I’ve never had any complaints.”

“How convenient.” Harrington sighs, and Billy suddenly has a memory of his third grade art class, how Josie Crockett had tried to steal his craft scissors from him and he’d stabbed her in the hand with the pointy end of the blade. He’d told his teacher that he’d only done such a thing because Josie had pulled his hair first, but Mr. Varney had just given him the same look Steve’s giving him now: long-suffering, like Billy’s simply too much work to bother with. “Look, take it from me, man: girls don’t always like aggressive. They wanna be romanced. They like being treated *special*, like they’re the only ones in the world—”

“That’s gay,” Billy says automatically, and doesn’t process the irony of what he’s said until Steve starts to laugh, a whole-body phenomenon that causes him to double over and hack up more blood into the bucket.

“It’s like,” Steve says when he straightens up, voice pleasantly hoarse, “like a—you know, like a dance.”

“A *dance*? Are you fucking kidding me, Harrington?”

“Hey, you wanna kiss like King Steve or not?” Harrington sits up, lowering the ice pack from his face. The swelling’s gone down a bit; his nose doesn’t look as crooked as it did before. Distracted as he always is by Harrington’s bone structure, Billy almost jumps when he feels Steve’s arms loop around his waist. “Let me show you, for Christ’s sake. It’ll be easier if I—”

Billy says, “Oh,” because Harrington doesn’t go for his mouth, not right away. Instead, he kisses along Billy’s jawline and down over his throat, hand sneaking up his back to play with at the curls at the base of his neck and Billy’s about to slap it off—it takes fucking *hours* to do his hair and Harrington should know that, he’s always bitching

about how sweat from the court makes his own hair stand up in one enormous cowlick—but then Harrington *does* something with his mouth and all thoughts about his hair promptly fly out of the metaphorical window. “More,” Billy murmurs, and he could’ve sworn that Harrington smiles into his collarbone before pulling him flush into his lap.

“I lead,” Steve breathes against his lips, “you follow.” When Billy presses in, he places a hand on his pectoral and gently pushes back. “*Follow*, Billy. It’s not a competition,” he kisses Billy softly, sucking on his lower lip before tipping Billy’s head back and breathing hotly over his neck, “you don’t fight it. You just feel ...”

“Feels good,” Billy breathes back, gasping a little when Harrington’s mouth gets rougher on his neck, showing more teeth. The waistband of Harrington’s gym shorts hovers somewhere below him, but the urge to reach down and slide his hand over that tempting spot is quashed by a clench of dismay in his belly, a hesitancy he knows all too well. It’s partly his conscience (for he does have one, measly and underdeveloped as it is—although a certain redhead bit-of-a-bitch might tell you differently); it’s also his survival instinct, honed and sharpened by two million years of evolution and then seventeen more of living under Neil Hargrove’s roof—telling him to look both ways before crossing the road, lest he gets steamrollered flat.

Instead of going for Harrington’s waistband, he rests his hand over his hipbone, scraping his nails lightly across the skin there, feeling it grow bumpy with gooseflesh. Harrington shivers violently and when Billy looks up, he finds Harrington already looking at him—always looking at him—pupils flat and dark and too big for his face. “You like that?”

“Yeah,” Harrington says, still shivering. “Yeah, I like that.”

Billy allows his hand to move higher, probing the links of Harrington’s spine, all the way up to the sloping curve of his shoulder blade and down again. “Anything else you like?”

(He can’t remember when the game stopped being about what girls like, and turned into what *Harrington* likes instead. Billy’s not complaining. Hard to complain, when the alternative is the dirty

magazine he'd stolen from the back of some married guy's car in Cali after sucking him off, its pages stuck together in sad soiled clumps.)

"My ears," says Harrington. Billy shouldn't like the way he sounds so helpless, so *gone* for it, but he does; he likes it more than anything that's come out of Harrington's mouth all day. "I like it when—m-my ears—" he hisses when Billy licks his earlobe, hips arching and writhing against the bed, "Yeah, Billy. Just like that. *Fuck*—"

"You can't tell anyone about this," Billy says in his ear. Licking, biting, pulling with his teeth and cataloging the movement of Harrington's hips, storing this information away for future reference. "Our little secret, you understand?"

Sticks and stones may break his bones, but all it will take is for someone to squeal on him—*Harrington and Hargrove, sitting in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G*—and if any of that schoolyard bullshit reaches his dad, Billy's good as dead.

The thing is, he knows squealers. Tommy H, that freckled fuck, is a squealer, and so is his doughy ginger girlfriend. His biology teacher, Mr. Guthrie, is a squealer—Billy can see it in the pouches of his weak chin, the way he averts his gaze every time Billy disrupts the class from the back row. He thought Harrington might be a squealer, but then they'd had the fight. Harrington had gone down without a sound when Billy punched him—there'd been no begging or tears, the two hallmarks of a squealer. He'd even gotten back up, which unnerved Billy more than spurring him on. Harrington had gotten back up, and he hadn't taken his eyes off Billy until Billy started hitting him again and Harrington hadn't gotten up after that, he'd stayed down.

"I won't tell anyone your secret," Harrington says, after a deep breath.

*Your secret.* Billy should hit him for that, too, but then the bell rings overhead, signaling the end of the period. "Guess you should go, then," he says. "You got your date tonight."

"Nah, I'm gonna cancel."

It's so fucking cliché, but Billy's heart actually skips a beat. "Yeah?

Why's that?"

"Broke my nose," Steve says, and Billy laughs wetly. He's still laughing when the nurse re-enters the room and scolds them for not keeping their heads elevated like she told them to, and it makes him wonder about punching Harrington's lights out later, if he can possibly waive that in favor of kissing him again. Making Steve sing, instead of making him squeal.

He's thinking he might.

**Author's Note:**

oh yeah and i'm on [tumblr](#) now

**UPDATE 12/10/19:** hey! i commissioned neonlaynes on tumblr to draw a piece for this fic and she came through in spectacular fashion! please check out the artwork [here](#) and show her some love!